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**GIRLS FEEL PRESSURE TO BE “TEENS BEFORE THEIR TIME”
ACCORDING TO A NEW STUDY FOR GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA**

Even Eight-Year-Olds Face Typical Teen Issues

NEW YORK (Sept. 13, 2000) – They want to be stylish. To be pretty. To wear a bikini “without a big fat tummy sticking out all over the place.” Sound like typical teens? These are the thoughts of third-graders who took part in a new study commissioned by Girl Scouts of the USA to determine the needs and concerns of “tweener” girls ages 8-12. Called Girls Speak Out: Teens Before Their Time, the study combines in-person focus-group interviews with an online survey. Key findings include:

“Developmental compression”: pre-teen girls are maturing faster mentally and physically, but emotionally they lack the skills to deal with this acceleration. The resulting disconnection leads to a level of stress and tension not formerly noted in 8- to 12-year-olds.

Pre-teen girls expressed concerns about body image and relationships, showing an alarming decline in self-approval. A fifth-grader told researchers, “I’ve been counting calories. I’m doing 1,000-1,200 calories a day.” Peer pressure is another factor for today’s pre-teen girls. A fifth-grader noted, “I moved up the popularity food chain after I got new clothes.”

Girls want and need to speak out on the issues that affect them, but the adults in their lives often are not prepared or willing to listen to what girls are saying. One fifth-grade respondent said of her parents, “All they say is I’m too young and I shouldn’t think about stuff like that until I’m 16. But I do [think about boys] anyway.”

Where Girls Grow Strong

“This is a wake-up call to all adults who are involved with girls and care about their healthy development,” said Marsha Johnson Evans, National Executive Director of Girl Scouts of the USA. “Nobody likes to hear that an eight-year-old girl is worried about being too fat or that she’s thinking about boys. But we can’t allow our personal discomfort to stop us from listening to girls and helping them appropriately address these issues.”

One piece of good news is that parents are still the most trusted source of information for girls in the “tween” years. The study concludes that it is vital for girls to have accurate and appropriate information from caring, supportive adults who not only listen but also encourage girls to speak out about issues that concern them.

Girls Speak Out: Teens Before Their Time is the first project conducted under the auspices of the new Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI). The GSRI is slated as a center for research and public policy information on the healthy development of girls as they mature toward adulthood.

“Girl Scouting is all about the adult-girl partnership – and putting the needs and concerns of girls first,” said Evans. “Our goal is to help today’s girls grow into tomorrow’s strong and confident leaders. Studies like this one provide important insight into the real issues that girls face – which is often different than what adults imagine these issues to be.”

The study involved focus group discussions of over 200 pre-teen girls nationwide, facilitated by Applied Research and Consulting LLC, from November 1999 through March 2000. The qualitative results were combined with quantitative data gathered from more than 1,000 girls who answered similar questions as part of an on-line survey in conjunction with SmartGirl.com from December 1999 through January 2000.

Girl Scouts of the USA is the world’s preeminent organization for girls, with a membership of more than 3.6 million girls and adults. Today, as when founded in 1912, GSUSA helps cultivate values, social conscience, and self-esteem in young girls, while also teaching them critical life skills that will enable them to succeed as adults. In Girl Scouting – and its special girls-only environment – girls discover the fun, friendship and power of girls together. Girl Scouts. Where Girls Grow Strong. Visit us at www.girlscouts.org

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